



Introduction to the Trinitarian Image

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Abstract

Catholics are taught God is none other than a Trinity, humans were created in the image of God, and creation reflects the Creator. Yet the Trinity is considered an incomprehensible mystery. Drawing upon scripture, Catholic teaching, and tradition for foundational principles, the document endeavors to define a Trinitarian image and discern such within the human soul and universally reflected in creation. Encountering three Trinitarian images (a natural, a baptismal, and a universal), each is contemplated seeking understanding of - and right relationship with - the Most Holy Trinity. A synthesis has been added and the dogma of incomprehensibility addressed. The article concludes with an appendix directed to non-Christians.

Keywords

Trinity, creation, Trinitarian image, image of God in humans, Jesus Christ, Catholic tradition, positive theology, Bonaventure's mirror, being, truth, love, cataphatism.

"The first Principle created this perceptible world as a means of self-revelation so that, like a mirror of God or a divine footprint, it might lead man to love and praise his Creator... the universe is like a book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker, the Trinity" (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 2,11,2; 2,12,1).

1. Introduction

Being finite, we shall ever be incapable of encompassing the Infinite, but what loss suffers the Infinite in filling the finite? We shall never fully comprehend the mystery of the Trinity, but what prevents us from ever savoring the heavenly sweetness of its contemplation? The Lord longs to be known,¹ but, since the Trinity is a mystery “hidden in God”,² how may we gain some vantage of the splendor of God’s Triune glory?

Thanks be to God for revelation - for it provides foundational principles from whence our inferences may commence. And so, calling upon the Holy Spirit for aid, let us consult tradition and Scripture and confer with those doctors who have preceded to benefit from their insights.

2. Foundational Principles

The Catholic faith reveals:

- ✧ God is Being.³
- ✧ God is Spirit.⁴
- ✧ God is Trinity - one Substance, three Persons.⁵
- ✧ The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the three Persons of the Trinity.⁶

¹ Cf. John 17:3 (New American Bible - used throughout unless otherwise noted); The Holy See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) par. 1 (hereafter cited in text as *Catechism*).

² *Catechism*, 237.

³ Cf. Exod 3:14 (King James Version); *Catechism*, 213; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948) 1, q. 4, a. 2 (hereafter cited as *ST*).

⁴ John 4:24; Peter Hünemann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash, eds., *Heinrich Denzinger. Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012) 3001 (hereafter cited in text as *Denzinger*).

⁵ *Denzinger*, 1330.

⁶ *Ibid.*

- ✧ The Son is eternally begotten from the Father; from the Father and the Son proceeds the Holy Spirit.⁷
- ✧ The Father is Principle of the Godhead.⁸
- ✧ The Son is properly named Logos/Word.⁹
- ✧ The Word is Truth.¹⁰
- ✧ The Holy Ghost is properly named Love/Gift.¹¹
- ✧ God created man and the universe.¹²
- ✧ Creation reflects the Creator.¹³
- ✧ Humans were made in the image God.¹⁴
- ✧ Jesus Christ is the Word incarnate.¹⁵

3. Distinguishing Features of a Trinitarian Image

Moses proclaimed God is.¹⁶ Jesus Christ reveals God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Thus Christ makes known God is a Trinity. Moreover Jesus makes possible knowledge

⁷ Ibid.; *Catechism*, Nicene Creed.

⁸ Cf. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington: Georgetown, 1990) Fourth Lateran Council, Cons. 1; *ST*, 1, q. 33, a. 1; Aquinas defines principle as “that whence another proceeds”; *Catechism*, 2789.

⁹ Cf. John 1:1; *Catechism*, 65; *ST* 1, q. 34, a. 2; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004) p. 26 (hereafter cited as *ItC*); Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985) pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ Cf. John 1:17, 14:6; *Catechism*, 2465-66.

¹¹ *ST* 1, q. 37, a. 1; 1, q. 38, a. 2; Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild, 1963) pt. 1, ch. 3, par. 9 (hereafter cited as *Brev*); John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, (May 18, 1986) 10.

¹² Gen 1; *Catechism*, Nicene Creed.

¹³ Cf. Wis 13:1; Rom 1:19-20; *Catechism*, 1147.

¹⁴ Gen 1:26-27; *Catechism*, 1701-1709.

¹⁵ John 1:14-18.

¹⁶ Exod 3:4-15.

¹⁷ Cf. John 3:11-21, 14:15-18, 14:26, 15:26; Matt 28:19.

and vision of God: “we worship what we understand” (John 4:22).¹⁸ Thus if we are made in the image of God and God is a Trinity, it seems if we seek, we should hope to find, within human nature, a Trinitarian image – an image of the invisible God, the Most Holy Trinity. But what is a Trinitarian image? What are its distinguishing features? Using the above principles, I look for it to reflect/reproduce the following relationships:

- triune: one entity, three subsistences¹⁹
- one subsistence is principle of the other two and in some way resembles or indicates the Father
- one subsistence is “begotten” by the principle subsistence and in some way resembles or indicates the Son²⁰
- one subsistence proceeds from the principle subsistence and the “begotten” subsistence and in some way resembles or indicates the Holy Spirit

A Trinitarian image is an image of the Creator reflected by means of creation or revelation and serves as an analogous type by which we may intelligibly contemplate the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. From the type we may gain fundamental and practical insight proportionate to understanding.²¹

4. The Image Within

¹⁸ See also John 14:6-9, 17:1-3; Matt 11:25-27.

¹⁹ By subsistence I mean something that subsists within the singularity.

²⁰ By “begotten” I mean a subsistence which springs directly from the principle subsistence and is its direct image.

²¹ Cf. Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God* (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild, 1960) ch. 1, par. 2, 9 (hereafter cited as *JMG*); *Brev* 2,11,2; 2,12,1.

Now, God is Being and Spirit. God is everlasting to everlasting.²² God is the I AM.²³ It follows, then, God is incorporeal and eternal Consciousness. Let us, therefore, focus our attention on the conscious, immaterial soul of man, the “I am”, which, in human nature, most closely resembles the living God, in order there to seek the divine image in which we were created. In ourselves, we see awareness is the principle of the conscious soul; from and with awareness spring forth memories and words, which image the perceptions of the awareness and by which the soul is able to recount, consider, and proclaim truth (thus, we may say awareness begets reason/cognition); and from the awareness and cognition proceeds will (for will requires both consciousness and knowledge). Thus in the conscious, immaterial, human soul we seem to find a Trinitarian image:

awareness, intellect, will²⁴

Does the image fit the above stated criteria?

- ✓ triune: the conscious human soul is awareness, intellect, will.
- ✓ awareness resembles I AM and is principle of both intellect and will (for we can neither think nor will without awareness).
- ✓ memories, words and truth reside in the intellect but have their origin from the awareness and image its perceptions. Again, words and truth reside in the intellect and all words and truth, it would seem, are contained in the Absolute Word and Truth, the Son. Thus the Son, it would seem, is Absolute Intellect.²⁵

²² Ps 90:2.

²³ Exod 3:14.

²⁴ I am quite aware St. Augustine proposes memory, understanding, and will as the Trinitarian image found in the mind (Augustine, *The Trinity* [New York: New City, 1991] bk. 14, par. 11). I contend Consciousness is inherent in I AM (the image of God revealed by Moses) and consciousness (awareness) is the starting point, the principle from which springs the Trinitarian image in man. Memory seems the receptacle of truth (truth as in a correspondent and communicable image of being recorded through the lens of the awareness) and inextricably linked to cognition/intellect.

²⁵ “there are two processions in God, one by way of the intellect, which is the procession of the Word, and another by way of the will, which is the procession of Love” (*ST* 1, q. 37, a. 1).

- ✓ will proceeds from both awareness and cognition and resembles the Divine Will: Love.²⁶

It does.

5. The Universal Image

Yet behold, human awareness, intellect, and will reside within and are oriented toward a larger, universal triad:

being, truth, love²⁷

in which the whole of creation seems to reside – for as far as my perception extends it seems all that is has being and all that is resides in truth (for truth is the image of being)²⁸ and all that is is held together and sustained by love (for all things work together for the good of those who love God).²⁹ Further, being, truth, and love evoke and coincide with the axioms above and evince God is:

Being, Truth, Love³⁰

Does this triad fit the Trinitarian criteria?³¹

- ✓ Triune: God is Being, Truth, Love.
- ✓ HE WHO IS is Being and Being is the principle of both Truth and Love (for Being is the spring of all that is).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Awareness is and observes being; intellect seeks, considers, retains and builds upon perceived truth; will pursues what it desires (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* [London: Oxford University Press, 1925] Bk. 1, 1-2).

²⁸ As a word is an image of what it signifies, so truth is a true and communicable image (reflection) of being.

²⁹ Rom 8:28.

³⁰ See also *Catechism*, 214-221.

³¹ Revelation, creation/nature, and logic enable simple understanding and analysis of absolute terms but by no means fullness of comprehension.

- ✓ The Son is the Word and the Word is Truth. Truth springs from Being and is its Image.³²
- ✓ Love cannot exist without Being and Love not proceeding from Truth would seemingly be blind but Providence is not blind. Hence it is evident Love proceeds from Truth. Moreover, in Scripture, the Son/Word/Truth sends the Holy Spirit/Love and the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Truth, thus it appears confirmed Love proceeds from Truth.³³

Yes.

6. Contemplation of the Natural Image

We see then three Trinitarian images. I'll call one natural, one baptismal, one universal.³⁴ The natural is the divine image found within:

awareness, intellect, will.

I term it natural because it resides at the very core of our nature and presents an image of God: a reflection of God's Nature, of what God is. Now how is it possible for us to become children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ, sharers in the Divine Nature, if we are incapable of knowing or understanding God, if there is no congruity? Yet we must know what God is if we are to become what we are called to be, and we are called to be God's children.³⁵ Thus, it would seem, God too has awareness, intellect, and will but since God so immeasurably surpasses us, since God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived,³⁶ let us strive for a more suitable rendering. Is not God

³² Truth is the begotten image of Being. Cf. Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; John 14:9; *Catechism*, 242.

³³ Cf. John 14:15-26, 15:26, 16:7. If Love proceeds from Truth, then Love must accomplish what accords with Truth.

³⁴ The traditional Trinitarian names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit invoked in the rite of baptism form a Trinitarian image.

³⁵ Cf. John 1:12; Eph 1:5; 2 Pet 1:4; *Catechism*, 51-52, 1691-92.

³⁶ Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* (Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1974) Ch 2.

unbounded and eternal?³⁷ Is not understanding in the intellect and is not perfect understanding wisdom? Is not perfect will love? - for no fault can be found in love.³⁸ Do we not proclaim “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty” (Rev 4:8)? Thus from the above we may infer the Lord our God is:

Holy, Infinite, Eternal Consciousness; Holy, Infinite, Eternal Wisdom; Holy, Infinite, Eternal Love.

Further, it would seem as necessary consequences: the universe God chose to exist is the best of all possible worlds;³⁹ God brings good out of evil;⁴⁰ all things work together for the good of those who love God.⁴¹ In addition, study of the divine image within - of the workings of the soul, of the relationship between soul and body, of the process of creating - would seem to provide insight into the operations of God and the relationship between God and the world.⁴² For example: the universe is a single, ordered system, so too the human body; the soul is the unitive and animating principle of the body, so too God the principle of order, harmony, and movement in the universe. The body is much like a complex machine - the vast majority of functions operate automatically, freeing the mind from slavery to it; thus it would seem God too remains free while yet maintaining and directing the vast universe. A further reflection: to the microorganisms living in the human body, the world must seem regular, ordered, bountiful - and they would be right in inferring the existence of an encompassing and directing intelligence of a higher order.

7. Contemplation of the Baptismal Image

³⁷ *Catechism*, 202.

³⁸ Love as defined and exemplified by Christ.

³⁹ Cf. Gottfried Leibniz, *The Monadology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898) par. 53–55.

⁴⁰ Cf. Aurelius Augustine, *The Enchiridion* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873) ch 11.

⁴¹ Rom 8:28. Who are “those who love God”? - cf. John 14:21–24, 15:12–14.

⁴² Cf. *JMG*, ch. 3, par. 1, 6–7.

Christians are baptized in the name of the:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

hence the baptismal Trinity. Not only does it introduce us to WHO GOD IS, it informs us of right relationship. Jesus Christ became man that men (humans) might become children of God.⁴³ Through baptism the child of Adam dies to sin, is washed clean, and made a new creation: a child of the Father, a sibling of the Son, a temple and instrument of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ Baptism initiates personal relationship and union with the Most Holy Trinity. Christ, the Word and Son, teaches, exemplifies, and enables right relation of child with the Father and makes possible reception of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Yet God does not “save us without us.”⁴⁶ To bear fruit, to attain eternal union, we must cooperate with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind in our conversion.⁴⁷

8. Contemplation of the Universal Image

The universal image:

Being, Truth, Love

manifests what is universally of God and intimates the Trinity as Source of our present good (existence, understanding, belonging) and as the final and Perfect Good - eternal Being, absolute Truth, infinite Love. What implications can we see? If God is the universal and eternal Good and Christ the way to right relationship with that Good, then Christ remains ever relevant, attractive and necessary. Thus it would seem the mission

⁴³ *Catechism*, 460.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rom 6:3-6; Eph 4:22-24; *Denzinger*, 239; John 20:17; Rom 8:14-17; Matt 12:48-50; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 John 4:7-8.

⁴⁵ Cf. John 12:44-50; John 14:23; 1 Cor 11:1; John 14:15-17.

⁴⁶ *Catechism*, 1847.

⁴⁷ Cf. Luke 13:6-9; Mark 11:12-21; Luke 10:25-28 (Douay–Rheims Bible); John 3:36; *Catechism*, 1427, 1430-31; *ItC* 88-89; Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), 11; Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 14; John 19:28.

of the people of God, the Church, to make Christ universally present, comprehensible and approachable to contemporary society.⁴⁸ Hence, if the baptized are to fulfill that mission, it would appear counterproductive to isolate ourselves by shunning the unorthodox. With the birth of the Church at Pentecost, the Mosaic theology and praxis of separation, isolation and exclusion⁴⁹ was supplanted with that of interaction, camaraderie, and community.⁵⁰ All peoples share in common their humanity but in the Christian should also be found the wisdom and love that is of Christ. Thus humanity is not to be avoided, looked down upon, or spurned but, if possible, led to Christ.⁵¹ Thus it seems the duty of the people of God to immerse themselves in society, exercise tolerance, seek common ground, build solidarity, and overcome division through love - all while remaining faithful to Jesus Christ, His Gospel, and His Church.⁵²

9. Synthesis

Since there is but one Most Holy Trinity, not three, let us see what we can deduce when considering the three Trinitarian images together.

The Father is Holy, Infinite, Eternal Consciousness; the I AM; Absolute, Infinite, Eternal, and Incorporeal Being, the Source of all that is.

The Son is Holy, Infinite, Eternal Wisdom; the Logos/Word and Image of the Father; Absolute, Infinite, Eternal Truth, the Abode of all truth.

⁴⁸ To make Christ present to society *does not* imply, include, or involve force or compulsion (cf. *Catechism*, 160).

⁴⁹ Cf. Exod 23:31-33, 33:16; Lev 20:24, 26; 1 Kgs 8:53.

⁵⁰ Cf. Mark 12:29-31; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15-18; Matt 28:18-20; John 15:9-11; *Catechism*, 1878-79, 1931, 1939.

⁵¹ Cf. Acts 10:28. How can the lost sheep be led home if not sought? Christ became human that humans may be led to God. So too we are to unite to humanity that humanity may be led to Christ.

⁵² Cf. Luke 6:27-45; Rom 12:20-21; *Catechism*, 900.

The Holy Spirit is Holy, Infinite, Eternal Love; the Absolute Will of the Father and the Son; the Universal Sustainer and Unifier, the Font of all love.

Are the above statements in conformity with Catholic teaching? Enshrined in dogma are the dictums: "We cannot know or express what God is."⁵³ And: "Great and incomprehensible is the mystery of the Holy Trinity."⁵⁴ It is true we are incapable of comprehending the Infinite. We cannot even know ourselves, or anything, in an absolute sense. But we are, in general, capable of understanding enough to live and direct our way in life.⁵⁵ Yet, if we are incapable of knowing or understanding God in a practicable sense, then theology seems merely a diversion little different than study of the Star Wars canon or Tolkien's Middle-earth. How can we claim to be children of God, please God, orient ourselves towards God, lead others to God if we know not what God is? Scripture teaches us God is Spirit (John 4:24), God is Logos (John 1:1), God is Love (1 John 4:7-8), God is Holy (Isa 6:3), God is Eternal (Ps 90:2), God is Infinite (1 Kgs 8:27), God is One (Mark 12:29 DRB). From the Gospel it is apparent Christ enables us to know God, to dwell ever with God, and to know the way to God.⁵⁶ Thus it is manifest from scripture we are capable of understanding, in a practicable sense, what God is. Moreover, since Christ is fully God and fully human, humans must possess natural compatibility for union with God. Thus it seems we must have an innate capacity to know God.⁵⁷ Again, if the human soul is immortal, then we must bear more resemblance to God than to nothing. If the soul is immortal, then truly we are gods. But if we refuse to unite to God's Word and Love, to embrace perfection, how do we differ from unholy devils? Thus (given the gravity of the consequences) it seems inconceivable that we be

⁵³ Cf. *ST* 1, q. 3; *Denzinger*, 367.

⁵⁴ *Denzinger*, 367.

⁵⁵ Though we know not the exact value of pi (π), we can calculate it accurately enough for practical purposes.

⁵⁶ Cf. John 14.

⁵⁷ Cf. John 17:3.

incapable of distinguishing between what God is and what God is not.⁵⁸ In fact it seems only God is knowable, for how can we have firm knowledge of what is mutable? Only God is immutable Being, immutable Truth, immutable Love: the Source, Sovereign, and Sustainer of creation. Thus every creature, every event, every situation provides opportunity to contemplate and commune with the LORD: through the circle we glimpse the eternal.⁵⁹

Now from Christ we learn God is Triune.⁶⁰ And since Christ came to reveal and unite us to God, why would He make known the Trinity if not to help us understand Who and What God is and who and what we are called to be?⁶¹ Christ is the Word made flesh and words convey definite meaning. Christ came to bring light, not shroud in impenetrable darkness, to bring understanding, not confusion.⁶² Genesis divulges humans were made in the image of God and since God is none other than a Trinity, should we not expect the divine image residing in each human to be triune? It is that very fact which makes the image distinguishable. God is not alien but Source and Father of all. Made in God's Image, we should have an intrinsic capacity to recognize God and recognition of the Trinitarian image within provides a key opening access to the Mystery and though we perceive as "through a glass darkly", discerning vaguely and indistinctly, nevertheless it provides a foundation for intelligibility in a practical sense.⁶³ Thus this paper does not seek or claim to invent a new Trinity or to disclose the ineffable but rather to discern and contemplate aspects of the Most Holy Trinity gleaned from revelation and creation.

Aquinas holds: "Man cannot obtain the knowledge of God by natural reason except from creatures. Now creatures lead us to the knowledge of God, as effects do to their

⁵⁸ Cf. *Catechism*, 366; Ps 82:6; John 10:34; Matt 5:48; Matt 25:31-46; John 10:14; Heb 5:14. By devil I mean an immortal soul who knowingly and willingly is at variance with the order of reality and thus suffers from the resultant discordance with Eternal Truth and Universal Love.

⁵⁹ Through the cycle, what remains invariable?

⁶⁰ Matt 28:19.

⁶¹ Cf. *Catechism*, 1, 460; Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 22.

⁶² John 1:4-5, 9, 8:12, 12:46.

⁶³ Cf. 1 Cor 13:12 KJV; *JMG*, ch. 3, par. 1; *ItC*, 76-77.

cause. Accordingly, by natural reason we can know of God that only which of necessity belongs to Him as the principle of things. Now, the creative power of God is common to the whole Trinity; and hence it belongs to the unity of the essence, and not to the distinction of the persons. Therefore, by natural reason we can know what belongs to the unity of the essence, but not what belongs to the distinction of the persons” (ST 1, q. 32, a. 1.).

I contend: if the image reflects the Imaged, we see perception, cognition, and volition, in humans, each contribute uniquely to the act of creation and the unique character of each is discernable, to an extent, in that which is created.⁶⁴ Thus the image within gives cause to infer each Person of the Trinity similarly contributes uniquely in the one work of creation, and this seems confirmed when considering the economy of salvation, for we see the Father remains, the Son reveals, and the Holy Spirit resides - each fulfilling a distinct role in the one work of salvation.⁶⁵ Moreover the Trinity seems reflected in all creatures: each creature exhibiting being, structure, and properties. Its being pointing to the Source of all being; its structure revealing Design; its properties indicating Purpose.

Thomists surely respond: “God can be in no way composite. 1. Every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being. 2. Every composite has a cause, for things in themselves different cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused, since He is the first efficient cause. 3. In every composite there must be potentiality and actuality; but this does not apply to God; for either one of the parts actuates another, or at least all the parts are potential to the whole. 4. Nothing composite can be predicated of any single one of its parts.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ For example: if we found a terracotta oil lamp buried among ancient ruins, we could deduce the existence of a conscious being who made the lamp, knowledge incorporated to design and construct it, and purpose for which it was intended.

⁶⁵ The Father sends – thus remaining eternally in heaven, the unmoved Mover (“Our Father who art in heaven”; cf. ST 1, q. 2, a. 3). The Son is sent to reveal (cf. Matt 11:27; John 1;18, 9:4-5, 14:21). The Holy Spirit is sent to reside with those who love God (John 14:15-17, 15:26).

⁶⁶ ST 1, q. 3, a. 7.

I retort: God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "He is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son he who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit he who is the Father or the Son."⁶⁷ "We distinguish the Persons, but we do not divide the Godhead."⁶⁸ The conscious human soul (which I hold to be the Trinitarian image within and serves as it were as a type) is one though it be awareness, intellect, and will. 1. The Son and Holy Spirit spring eternally from the Father. The intellect and will ever spring from the awareness. 2. God is Trinity eternally. The fully conscious human soul is ever awareness, intellect, and will. 3. God is ever God, not potentially God. The conscious soul is ever soul, not potentially soul. 4. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; not three Gods but One. The awareness is soul, the intellect is soul, the will is soul; not three souls but one.

Does not the human soul bear a Trinitarian resemblance? Yet if we attribute Consciousness to the Father, Cognition to the Son, and Volition to the Holy Spirit, how is Consciousness a Person? Cognition? Volition? In fact, what is a person? Is not a person a living entity with whom we can commune? And is not participation in life communion with I AM (the Father)? Is not contemplation of Christ's words and of truth communion with the Divine Cognition (the Word and Truth)? Do we not commune with the Divine Volition (Love) when acting in accordance with Christ's commands of love? If then the Father is the living power in God of Consciousness and the Son is the living power in God of Cognition and the Holy Spirit is the living power in God of Volition, how does the Father think or the Son will or the Holy Spirit perceive? Again, let us look to the type within: we see awareness perceives what intellect thinks and will intends, intellect knows what awareness perceives and will pursues, will aims at what awareness perceives and intellect instructs. Thus we are guided to infer: the Father perceives what the Son knows and the Holy Spirit loves; the Son knows what the Father perceives and the Holy Spirit loves; the Holy Spirit loves what the Father perceives and the Son knows.

Admittedly the above reflection is rather obscure but does it not contour to the mystery? Observe a photograph, how alike and yet unlike the image to the actual

⁶⁷ *Denzinger*, 530.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

object. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts” (Isa 55: 8-9). God will ever exceed our capacity. Nonetheless should that prevent the Word from revealing, to those who seek, what they are capable of understanding?

Yet, on what basis do I presume to contest an established doctrine? Actually, I contest not the doctrine but call to question interpretation and application. I appeal to the teaching of Christ, Himself, and to reason. For, if a prevalent interpretation of a traditional teaching renders scripture unintelligible and an intelligible interpretation congruent with the word of Christ and experience be offered, then the alternative interpretation, it seems, should merit consideration. If established doctrine on the transcendence of God is interpreted to assert “we cannot know or express, even in a practicable sense, what God is”, then I find it in contradiction to the positive teaching of Christ, as stated above. For if words are unable to communicate, according to our capacity, a true understanding of God, what light does Christ bring to humanity? of what relevance the Gospel? – even the word “God” is stripped of meaning and the intellect rendered incapable of directing the will toward its final end. Is such teaching intelligible? If so, how differ we from lost souls blindly groping the dark circles of hell? Further, humans are both rational and emotional creatures. A person can either be controlled by emotion or restrain the influence of emotion through reason. Those controlled by emotion can be manipulated by others. Those who follow reason have power to direct themselves.⁶⁹ Rational exchange (dialectical examination) respects the dignity, autonomy, and freedom of the individual and is the natural and proper mode of communication in regard to explication, critical consideration, and decision. Thus to effectively herald the Gospel to those who heed reason, we cannot plead the mystery but, when asked a rational question, offer a reasoned response. If asked how we understand God as Trinity, we declare “we cannot know or express what God is, the Trinity is an incomprehensible Mystery”, are we not, in fact, pronouncing Christ’s

⁶⁹ Reason can be led astray through reliance upon false information, but if the Word is Truth, there exists an unfailing foundation upon which reason can build.

revelation of the one God Who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unintelligible, knowledge of what we worship unattainable, the Gate to Heaven inaccessible,⁷⁰ and reason irrelevant? What elevated understanding does this offer the analytical inquirer? What impelling reason to embrace such a system? Is not such teaching opposed to the authority of Christ and barricade the most natural means of rational evangelization? Some may say: “Belief is not equivalent to knowledge. We may believe things about God but not know what God is. We are saved by faith not knowledge.” But is not a false belief equivalent to a fantasy? If the content of a belief corresponds with reality, then the belief serves as practicable knowledge. Truth believed and acted upon serves as knowledge. If someone knows something and shares it, then others too can make use of it. If someone knows how to get to a destination and produces an accurate map, then others too are enabled to make the journey: the knowledge has been made available. We place faith in the map, but once arrived we too acquire direct knowledge and experience of the destination and passage. A well placed trust is confirmed by its fruits: it serves as knowledge and brings to knowledge. Now Christ claims knowledge of God and proclaims the way to union with God. We must place faith in Christ to follow and learn from Him but upon conversion we too begin to enter into direct personal and conscious relationship with God and are enabled to help lead others to Christ and the Father.⁷¹ But the Father must be intelligible to the human mind before it is possible to orient the will toward Him, before conversion is possible. Christ leads to encounter with God, to relationship with God, to communion and friendship with God – thus to knowledge of God. Christ is the Light of humanity, in whom there is no darkness,⁷² His revelation of God’s nature must, of necessity, be intelligible and capable of illumining understanding. Christ is both infinite and finite, He manifests the Infinite to the finite; He reveals God through human language and action. Sense impressions provide the immaterial material necessary to formulate and accumulate a vocabulary of associative meaning. This vocabulary is employed in human thought and communication. It may

⁷⁰ Cf. John 10:7-9. If Christ’s word is unintelligible, it would seem the Gate to Heaven remains sealed.

⁷¹ Cf. *Catechism*, 1431, 545, 591, 1041; John 4:42, 14:18-21.

⁷² Cf. John 1:4, 8:12; 1 John 1:5

also be used in parabolic expression through which the Word enables meaningful and apposite understanding of God to human beings. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The words of Christ manifest, according to our capacity, the Ineffable. "Being incomprehensible, he wished to be comprehended."⁷³ For how is it possible to love with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole soul something we are incapable of knowing or understanding? Children are instructed in what they are able to comprehend, not in what is beyond them, but how can we please the Father if He be wholly beyond comprehension? If union with God is the purpose of the Catholic faith, then Christ must enable practicable knowledge of God.

Now if the Word is Truth, truth manifests a reality and a reality can also be known through its effects. In this paper, I point to those effects which evince the truth of the Trinitarian nature of the Creator and LORD.

10. Appendix: Word, Actuality, and Truth

The above may perhaps serve as a sufficient introduction towards consideration and contemplation of the Trinity for those of Christian faith. Yet many are not so oriented. Some regard religion a propagated delusion, a mythical construct, a social expedient utilized by those predominant to provide the subservient psychological refuge and diversion from stark reality and promote public morals, stability, self-sacrifice, solace and hope in the face of death?⁷⁴ Is the Catholic faith such an invention, a sublime, heavenly myth of vast proportion or is it truly revelation and in conformity with actuality? Can the Catholic claim to verity be somehow substantiated? All rests upon the truth of Christ's assertions.

⁷³ Denzinger, 294.

⁷⁴ Cf. Plato, *Laws* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926) 662-664c; Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1913) Bk. 2, Ch. 7, par. 9-11.

Now how do we come to trust the word of another? Do we not make inquiry regarding reputation? Do we not test to see if words correspond with actions? After multiple such tests, if he or she remains consistent, do we not begin to trust? Do we not continue to trust unless at some point we detect inconsistencies? Let us then so examine the reputation, words, and actions of Christ.

As for reputation, we observe, ever since that Pentecost recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles* (2:1-41), his followers who testify on his behalf have ever increased.⁷⁵ The whole of the *New Testament* is a testimony on behalf of Jesus Christ. Christianity, the cult of Christ, celebrates and worships, round the world, his divinity. Thus his reputation is without parallel - to such extent he is exalted as God incarnate.⁷⁶

Do Christ's words correspond with his actions? How can we obtain direct knowledge except through experience? From *1 Thessalonians* we find the injunction: "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (5:21). As a scientist relies upon experiment to test the verity of a hypothesis, so here it seems necessary to submit to Christ's instruction if we are to observe its effect.⁷⁷ And having so striven, I present some observations.

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find

⁷⁵ It would seem that Pentecost occurred around the year 33 A.D. - for an interesting determination of the year Jesus died, see: Jimmy Akin, "7 Clues Tell Us *Precisely* When Jesus Died (the Year, Month, Day, and Hour Revealed)," *National Catholic Register*, April 10, 2013, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/jimmy-akin/when-precisely-did-jesus-die-the-year-month-day-and-hour-revealed>. The community of the baptized greatly enlarged by about three thousand on that day (Acts 2:41). As of 2011, the Pew Research Center estimated the contemporary Christian demographic at 2.18 billion - see: "Global Christianity – A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," *Pew Research Center*, December 19, 2011, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

⁷⁶ Cf. John 1:1-18.

⁷⁷ When Jesus states, "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test" (Matt 4:7; Luke 4:12). He seems to mean we are not to make trial of God's assurances: treating them as obligations rather than as truths contingent on conversion and faithfulness - as if someone, while refusing submission to the Lord, nevertheless demands favor by throwing God's promises in His face. Such appears not the case if we seek to verify Christ's word by submitting to it and observing the fruit which develops - for Christ, Himself, invites us to follow and observe (cf. John 1:35-51, 10:37-38).

rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Matt 11:28-30). "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37 KJV).⁷⁸ "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

After seven years laboring to find in life depth of meaning, to locate a foundation manifestly worthy of lifelong dedication and commitment upon which to build - exploring various cultures, lifestyles and worldviews – all at length seemed ultimately in vain. My quest to find a viable alternative to conformity with the Establishment had brought desperation and corruption, not enlightenment. Lost, alone, desolate, defiled, clinging precariously to the remains of sanity (with strength diminishing) and facing a crossroads, it was only then I became willing to surrender, to relinquish autonomy, to place final hope in Christ: to follow wherever He might seem to lead. Thus resolved and approaching in prayer, I begged for mercy, guidance, assistance, acceptance. My prayer led to the abandonment of former ambitions, to a return to those whom I knew had love for me, to pay more heed to their advice, and do my best to serve them well – including integration with the established order of things. Setting out, I sought each day to discern what Christ would have me do and not avoid what life placed before me. As time and events progressed so did my thankfulness to God. My prayers, it seemed, were not despised. In His mercy, He had lifted up the lowly!⁷⁹ In Jesus I found the foundation upon which to build, an unfailing rock on which to stand. He provided rest, washed away iniquity, raised me from the pit into which I had fallen, granted deliverance from guilt, dispersed desolation, filled the void in my soul, restored hope, purpose, peace, and made all things fit together. His yoke has not been unbearable nor onerous and after thirty years, He ever remains my refuge. Hence my trust in Christ has not been in vain and He has been ever present and constant. Thus showing Himself true and consistent in what I am able to assess by experience - in addition to a whole tradition of confirming testimonies of unquestionable sincerity, perspicacity, and sagacity from distant past to present – gives, in my opinion, practical warrant to trust

⁷⁸ "A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn" (Ps 51:19; 51:17 KJV).

⁷⁹ Cf. Luke 1:52.

Christ in all things. Therefore, according to my observation, to ancestors, and living tradition, the Catholic faith is more than an engaging abstraction, Christ's words exhibit correspondence to reality.

Yet some will surely say:

“Judge a tree by its fruit. The fruits of Christianity in general and of Catholicism in particular prove noxious. Who has killed more on the planet, exploited more area, plundered more goods, destroyed more cultures, dehumanized more peoples, betrayed more covenants, oppressed more persons? The discovery of the New World provided ideal opportunity for Christendom to demonstrate the efficacy of grace and its resultant moral elevation. Yet rather than secure and establish mutual friendship, brotherhood, prosperity and happiness and cooperate to maintain the pristine condition of the earth, the Christians preferred gold, wealth, land, and power and proceeded to distain, oppress, slaughter, and pillage the indigenous inhabitants and efface the ‘earthly paradise’.⁸⁰ Even to this day, Western civilization, the offshoot of Christendom, continues to support and enforce policies which massacre, marginalize, and displace indigenous and unassimilated peoples and pollute and raze the land. Is it not obvious the Christian faith is an ingenious and alluring fable used by the greedy and ruthless to deceive and control the simple and the feeble? How can we possibly believe the assertion Jesus Christ is capable of elevating and saving humanity when observation of history and actuality reveals Catholics and Christians as amoral as anyone else - if not worse?”⁸¹

Crimes against humanity cannot justly be attributed to Christ. Christ commands love, not murder, exploitation, plunder, destruction, dehumanization, betrayal, oppression,

⁸⁰ See Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (England: Penguin, 1992); B. Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1908-16); Cf. Bartolomé de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1992) pp.20, 136, 165-66, 171.

⁸¹ The above “quotation” is a paraphrase, a conglomerate of voices emerging in today's society. A profound account of Christian crimes against humanity is presented in: David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford, 1992). See also Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York: Random House, 2002) for an account of contemporary Western atrocities.

avarice, disdain, duplicity, despotism, or depravity:⁸² “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Christ presents and exemplifies the concept of love. We have the freedom either to embrace and, with Christ’s help, actualize it or reject and shun it. Obviously the power to reject or ignore has held and continues to hold great sway. Yet all of us have witnessed and experienced love. If not for love would the human race still exist? If not for love would the child grow to maturity? If not for love would we witness one freely sacrificing for another? Thus love is more than a concept and Christ’s call to love is not unintelligible, impracticable, or unsalutary. Therefore, despite significant evidence to the contrary, I contend: to not personally evaluate and discern the truth of Christ’s claims is to evade an essential existential question. “O taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps 34:8 KJV, Ps 34:9).

Notwithstanding, there yet remain those who proclaim:

“Survival supersedes morals. Predation is natural. Might makes right prevails in nature and among men. Thus, if God is, it (predation) must be of God. Kill or be killed is the natural law and it is unreasonable not to conform to manifest actuality.”⁸³

Is not such a view contrary to conscience, justice, and solidarity? It opposes one to all others and establishes violence, coercion, and manipulation as normative behavior. Yes, predation exists in creation. Being born with a material body into a closed system, we are under compulsion to feed upon other organisms for sustenance. Hence we live upon the sacrifice of other life-forms. Sacrifice is the fuel of life. For life to continue, we too, in turn, become the sacrifice. Does that make life not good? As Christ demonstrates and justice dictates it is only right to offer ourselves in thanksgiving to God for participation in the gift of life. Self-sacrifice for the common good is an act of love. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). As is clearly revealed in the Eucharist, the free offering of oneself, unreservedly, to the

⁸² Cf. John 15:9-17; Luke 22:37; Ezek 22.

⁸³ This “quotation” too is a paraphrase of a current ideology having roots, it would seem, in Machiavellianism and Darwinism.

Father for the life and joy of His people is the ultimate act of love.⁸⁴ Is it not apparent love sustains life? Thus to love is to conform to manifest actuality - for only love accords due honor to God, family, neighbors, creation, and conscience. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:19). What fuel do we have to offer but our very lives?⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Cf. Rom 12:1.

⁸⁵ There is no end to contemplation, thus no definitive rendition. Special thanks to Steve L. Montoya of Springer, NM and A. Robert Lauer of the University of Oklahoma for reviewing drafts of this paper and sharing criticism, insights and advice.

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